

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A ROMANCE OF MODERN DAYS.

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CHAPTER XXXVII. PROOF POSITIVE.

PENELOPE stepped into the dark wood feeling dazed and helpless. Even now she could not believe that this fortune had any foundation in fact. It was impossible that for so many years her father should have lived a life of sordid poverty and of parsimoniousness, when he knew that a word from him would bring hidden treasure to light. She looked back on the struggles of her uncle and of her mother, both of them determined not to sink down into the mean, sordid conditions of the existence lived by the King and his son, and the remembrance of those past struggles made tears start to her eyes.

"He could not have been so cruel as that," she said to herself; but the thought that her father had stooped to many a meanness, and many a miser's ruse, prevented her from dismissing the idea as impossible. When she looked back at her own youth, her young ambition, her ignorance of life and of the power of love, her anger rose to its height. Had her father kept his secret till it was too late?

"No," she said again, "it is impossible. His mad fancy pleases itself in the thought that he has found hidden treasure, and he wishes to punish me for marrying beneath me. What would that matter, what would anything matter if—I loved him?"

She was walking fast, heedless of the ruts, heedless, too, of the occasional logs and fallen trees lying in the path. But all at once she found herself at the

stile, and she paused. The mist was slowly dispersing, and the moon was scattering the fleecy clouds. A night-jar made itself heard, and a frightened hare crossed her path. She was looking towards the Palace, but she had to go down a green slope, and to cross the river, before she could reach the glen. The night was still, and the cool air had a calming influence on her nerves. As she looked across the valley, following with her eyes the path she must take, she was suddenly dismayed by seeing a figure walking quickly down the opposite slope, and making straight for the wood. The light was not strong enough to show more than that it was a human being moving swiftly, and coming on evidently with some set purpose.

Penelope was not in the least nervous. She had been brought up so close to nature that the fear of loneliness and darkness, which most women possess by nature, had never troubled her. Part of her nameless attraction lay in this want of feminine weakness. It was not an assumption of manly strength, but merely the absence of the weakness of the other sex. For this reason she was surprised at suddenly feeling a strange fear of the on-coming figure. Her heart beat fast, and she felt rooted to the spot, whilst her eyes remained fixed on the advancing form. Gradually she discerned that it was a woman, then as the figure grew nearer and nearer, walking unusually fast up the hill, Penelope uttered a little cry of surprise. It was Dora Bethune.

Dora! What could bring her here at this time of night? She must have been to bed, and have risen from it to come here. What folly! Was every one going mad? Still, Penelope felt possessed by the same strange and nameless fear. She half thought

that she would hide in the wood and let the girl pass her, but this, too, seemed senseless, and so, moving out of the shadow, she stood by the stile waiting for the girl's head to appear above the brow of the steep slope.

In a few moments Dora reached the top, and made straight towards Penelope. During the two minutes' walk which separated them, Penelope's heart beat even quicker than before, for Dora seemed to be entirely unconscious that another human being was near to her, and yet she must be able to see her. The next instant Penzie understood the true facts of the case. The young girl was walking in her sleep! The Princess did not realise this a moment too soon, but, having done so, she did not know how to act. She had read of such things, but she had never before come in contact with a case of sleep-walking. She must not wake her, that was all she knew. One moment more and she stepped quickly to one side, leaving Dora to reach the stile without interruption.

What was she doing? What ought Penelope to do? Then the truth flashed upon her. Dora had been so much frightened and impressed by the scene through which she had gone, that she was re-enacting it now. Another second, and Penzie's heart bounded for joy. She would follow her, and, if it were true, she would know.

In an instant she, too, had climbed over the stile, and was following Dora as noiselessly as she could. She noticed that the girl had put on her hat, but that she had not dressed herself fully. Her hair hung down her shoulders, and she had merely slipped on a dress and jacket over her nightdress. Penelope thought that she ought to turn her aside and lead her home. The girl might catch cold or harm herself; but the great wish to know the truth, and the curious chance which had made it possible for her to find it out, prevented her from listening to the voice of prudence. Besides, she argued, an attempt to take Dora home might result only in awaking her, and would certainly frighten her. It was better to let her alone, and merely to follow her.

It was strange how surely and how unhesitatingly the girl walked on. She seemed to be able to see perfectly, though her eyes were shut, and she carefully avoided the fallen trunks and occasional holes with a precision difficult to understand and to believe.

Once or twice Penzie thought that she must be dreaming, and that she was follow-

ing a ghostly phantom which was luring her on to some scene of danger. Her limbs trembled as she followed the figure, sure only of one thing, that, whatever happened, she must not lose sight of her. Another strange fact was that Dora when awake could not walk as fast as Penelope, but now the Princess found it difficult to follow her.

In this strange manner they both walked through the wood, till they reached the identical spot where Dora had been gathering ferns. Here the girl paused, then stooped down and seemed to be gathering up the poor roots, whose leaves were already beginning to wither. Seeing this, or appearing to do so, the girl threw them down again, and leaving the path, plunged into the wood.

Still Penelope followed, hardly able to still her beating heart, and full of certainty that now she was going to discover the secret.

Once, from the difficulty of following her through the thick brushwood, she lost sight of Dora, but pressing forward she again caught sight of her cloak, and at the same time she noticed how heedless she was of the branches and brambles which impeded her and sadly tore her loose hair.

"I ought not to let her go on," thought Penzie, but the wish to know, to make sure, was too strong within her, and still she followed. Again Dora turned suddenly, and, in doing so, found herself face to face with Penelope. The latter shrank back. The expression of the girl's face was so strange, so unnatural, her eyes were wide open, and she was talking to herself.

"It's here, it's here. You must go into this ditch. I can't swear, you know, but a Bethune never breaks a promise, never. Let me help you. I can't believe it."

"Dora," said Penelope softly, "where is it?"

Dora did not appear to heed the question, but plunged knee-deep into the ditch, and Penzie kept close beside her. Then she stooped and parted the ferns and the brambles, and at last the Princess saw the old stone wall.

"It's here, here; the stone must be turned round—I want to tell her, but indeed I must not. I promised." She tried to move the stone with her fingers till her very nails bled, then, as if guided by some invisible power, she plunged her hand into the ditch and brought out a chisel, evidently that which had been dropped there by the King.

"That's it; now—now I can do it," she muttered, and with quite an unnatural degree of skill she loosed the stone and disclosed the long-hidden box.

Penelope could no longer doubt that if there were any truth in the discovery, this was the place. But what could she do? She would have liked to draw Dora away, she even gently pulled her cloak, but the girl seemed endowed with a supernatural strength of purpose which nothing could frustrate.

"The gold is in these bags, and here are notes and papers. He says so. Is it true? The Princess doubts me. I never told a lie in my life. Forster, tell me, is it true? You always speak the truth."

Penzie shivered from a fear she had never before experienced. She saw the girl plunge her fingers into a canvas bag and finger the coin it contained. She even took some out, and the clink sounded hateful to the Princess. The accursed gold was here, really here, but—

"Dora," she said softly, overcome with fear and a strange misgiving, "put all this away and come with me."

Dora lifted her head as if she had heard a very, very distant sound, and as if she were suddenly startled. She began hastily putting back the gold piece by piece. By accident she dropped one of them into the ditch; then she fell on her knees and searched hurriedly for the missing coin. Penelope thought the search was hopeless, and that she must wake her or get her away by force, but in another moment Dora rose up with the lost coin in her hand, and very hastily she began to put everything back.

So far all was well.

Penzie heaved a sigh of relief to think that, at all events, she knew, and that she could by-and-by come here again by herself. But at this moment she saw that Dora was struggling to replace the stone, and that the task was almost beyond her strength. It had become wedged, and though the poor girl tore her hands over it, and even allowed Penelope to help her, it was all in vain, the secret door would not swing back.

What was to be done?

"Come away," said Penzie quickly. "It is getting late; you must come home."

She took her hand firmly and tried to draw her away, but she was dealing with an unknown force.

"I must, I must hide it! Penelope must not know. I promised."

"Dora, Dora, come away."

It was in vain, for still the girl struggled with her hopeless task. Dawn was now overpowering the moonlight. Some early shepherd might pass that way, and Penzie, despairing, felt that soon she must wake the girl.

"Dora," she called, "Dora!" speaking louder.

Suddenly the stone seemed to move of itself, and slipped back into its right position just as Penzie had shaken her companion violently by the arm, and had managed to awake her from her strange sleep.

As Dora slowly regained consciousness she uttered a sharp cry of fear and horror combined, and fell forward against Penelope.

"Where am I? What is it? Oh, Penzie, Penzie, what has happened?"

"You came here in your sleep, dear, don't be afraid. I am here with you. It is this stupid secret that haunted you."

Dora gazed round her, horror-struck at seeing where she was.

"Oh, Princess, you know! I have shown you! In my sleep, in my sleep! I did not know it! Why did you follow me?" and she burst into tears.

"Nonsense, dear, you could not help it. Come back now. Take my arm."

Dora silently did as she was told, and for some time the two painfully pushed their way through the tangled undergrowth. At last they came to the old path where lay the heap of withering ferns.

Here Dora paused and looked round again.

"Princess, Princess, why did you follow me? Oh, it was cruel of you! A Bethune never breaks a promise. What will Forster say? I—I—did it without—without—"

Then without any warning the girl fell down unconscious upon the ground. The fright and the strain of the strange episode had been too much for her.

Penelope, horrified, knelt down and tried to revive her. But there was no water at hand, and it was hopeless to think of carrying her.

"What shall I do?" she thought; then, after a few moments, she saw plainly that she must go and get help.

The girl was still, cold, and stiff, so this was no mere fainting fit. But what would Forster say? Was she, Penelope, doomed to hurt all those she loved?

However there was no help for it, she must run to the farm and get Jim Oldcorn to come and carry Dora home. In another

moment she was hastening towards the place she had left only two hours before.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. AN UNEXPECTED RETURN.

"WHEN ah went t'scheul," remarked Jim Oldcorn when, in the clear grey dawn, he had almost carried Dora up to her room, "ah mind ooar oald misses was taken wi' the fits loike this."

"Hush, Jim," said the Princess impatiently. "She is better now. Send Betty here and say nothing about it. Was my father asleep when I called you?"

"He skratit his head, but he cudn't mak nothing of my pretendit business, so he turned round and fell to sleeping. It's sum'at like t' man to tak his own way."

"Well, that will do, Jim," said the Princess, impatiently waving him away as she began to apply restoratives; but it was some time before she and Betty could make Dora recollect where she was and what she had been doing.

When at last she recovered from her lethargy, they were glad enough to see her turn her face to the wall and fall asleep.

"I can't make head nor tail of this story," said Betty, as she put the room tidy and took away Dora's dress, all bedraggled and muddy.

"She walked in her sleep, and I am afraid I woke her," said Penelope. "Don't talk about it, Betty, to the other servants."

"As if I should, indeed! It's not much conversation these empty-headed girls get out of me, Miss Penelope—Mrs. Winskell, I mean. But you should be getting some rest too, ma'am, you're as white as a ghost. I'll stop here with the young lady. It's a bad night's work. There never will be any luck on the house as long as all these strangers keep plaguing us."

Penelope, leaving Betty in charge, walked away. She allowed her to make remarks which she would not have stood from anybody else, for Betty belonged to the old days of poverty before this miserable gold had come to ruin her life.

Having once more regained her own room, the bride, who yet was no bride, sat down utterly weary and spent. It was true that she had brought Dora home safely, but how could she truthfully account to Forster for all this night's work? As for herself, she had seen the gold, she knew now where to find it, but what could she do? It belonged to her father, and he was not likely to part with it. The root of all

evil it certainly was. It was indeed cursed, doubly cursed.

What should she do next? Her uncle must be told, he had more power with her father than she had. Perhaps he could make the poor crazy brain understand the necessity there was of examining this secret hoard, and of at once placing it in some safe place. How much was there, and what was its value? Had she known of this sooner she might have married Forster, and she might have been happy now! All her self-sacrifice was wasted, utterly wasted. In this lay the bitterness of the knowledge, and it was like the bitterness of death.

She was too restless to go to bed, so she changed her dress and did away with the signs of all she had gone through. Sometimes Forster came down early. Perhaps she could meet him and explain something to him about Dora's misadventure. Perhaps Dora would not be able to leave the Palace, and that would mean another few days of happiness for her—but afterwards, afterwards? What was to happen?

When the September sun rose bright and clear over the dales and glens, Penelope, pale but calm, sauntered out into the garden and began picking some late roses for the drawing-room. It was a perfect day, all the mist was clearing away. Summer was not yet gone, but still seemed to be a favoured guest, to be made the most of and smiled upon. All nature spoke of love and of happiness, and Penelope knew that she, too, was living under its spell. Some day the winter would come, and she must forget the glory of this summer of life; but not yet, her heart cried out.

All at once she was conscious of footsteps. She knew they were Forster's footsteps, and that he was near her. An angle of the Palace was hiding her, but he would come round, they would meet. She stood up with her hands full of roses, and when Forster came upon her the colour from them appeared to reflect itself upon her face. She herself was a dream of beauty, and he stood still almost speechless at the sight of her. He had meant to avoid her till necessity made him decide what was best for her—for both of them.

"Penelope," he said, conscious of using her Christian name without permission. Then he paused.

"I wanted to see you," she exclaimed. "Dora is not well. She had rather a shock last night. My father alarmed her, and her mind dwelt upon the fright, I suppose, for quite late I saw her walking in her

sleep, where we left her last night in the wood."

"Dora did that! How strange! But you were there, too?" Forster was somewhat puzzled by these nocturnal walks.

"Yes, I had gone to see my father. He often sleeps at the farm. Perhaps it is safer not to mention it to Dora. Still, I do not think she can travel to-day."

"But, indeed, we must go—I must go," he said, knowing that he was living as it were over a volcano. "My mother expects us, and now that you and the air of the Rothery Glen have made me so much better, I must not delay any longer. I must decide——"

"Yes, we must decide," said Penelope slowly, then she added: "but, indeed, Dora must be allowed rest. Unfortunately I woke her, and the shock was great."

"Shall I go and see her? Poor little girl!"

"No, she is asleep now. Betty has been sitting with her. Still, I am sure she will need rest. You must not go to-day."

They were both silent for a few minutes, but Forster slowly took a rose from her hands as if he were unconscious of the action.

"In some cases," he said after a time, beginning to walk down the drive by her side, "in some cases there is nothing but flight left for a man, even if he is brave."

Penelope raised her head slightly higher, as if the word flight was one she could not understand.

"My ancestors did not know the meaning of flight," she said coldly. "If you think that——" how could she explain this new discovery and the freedom she hoped to get from it?

"That what?"

"That one may never brave the displeasure of others, you hardly understand our Dale character."

They walked slowly on and on. The drive had turned and they were not visible from the house. Forster's resolutions, because they had been very feeble, began to melt away like morning dew; but outwardly he was calm, and exhibited no tell-tale emotion.

"You do not understand that since yesterday I have had to look at things from a new point of view. There is no longer any other way of avoiding the precipice."

They had now reached the gate of the drive which opened out upon the road. Across some green meadow lands one could

see the beautiful lake shimmering beneath the rising mist. Some sparrows, which had been giving themselves a dust bath upon the high-road, flew quickly away. Overhead several swallows circled above the water, or darted with lightning speed after the buzzing flies. As they both gazed silently and almost aimlessly down the road, conscious of the presence of each other and of nothing else, Forster saw the dust fly upwards, and the sound of wheels was distinctly audible. Penelope, who hated the ordinary tourist, drew back a few steps and sheltered herself behind an evergreen oak which bordered the drive; but Forster did not move. A few seconds passed, then Penelope heard him exclaim in a tone of surprise:

"What is the matter? Won't you come home? It is breakfast-time." But instead of answering, Penelope remained silent and rooted to the spot, and it was another voice that called out, and another step that moved towards them.

"Forster! You here? Thank Heaven!" It was Philip's voice.

From her hidden position Penelope saw everything, but she seemed spellbound, and could not come forward.

"Go round to the back," said Philip to the driver, using the tone of a master in his own home. This made her wince, and in another minute she saw the two meeting at the gate only a few steps from her.

"Philip!" said Forster, and paused.

"Yes, you are surprised. You don't know how glad I am to see you here. I have not stopped a moment on the way, I would not even telegraph. Where is Penelope? There is nothing the matter with her, I hope."

"No—no, she is here."

The spell was broken, and Penelope moved towards him, saying:

"Why did you not write? Is anything the matter?"

For a moment Philip looked at her, his glance seeming to search every line of her face, as if to find out the answer to the all important question; but he saw nothing new, only the old look of coldness. He heaved a little sigh.

"I am sorry, dear, that I startled you, but you see I came as quickly as a letter could arrive. I found that, after all, I could not keep away, because of——"

"Of what?" said Forster. He seemed scarcely to know what he was saying.

"You will think me ridiculous, but it was because of you. Three nights you

appeared to me and beckoned me to follow you. Of course it was a pure hallucination, a touch of fever, I suppose, but the impression was so strong there was no withstanding it. I thought you must be very ill, so I came."

"But I am much better, nearly well. Dora and I came here to—I mean I thought the Dale air would cure me, and it has. I'll go now and warn the Duke of your arrival."

Taking a side-walk, Forster disappeared, leaving the two together. He wished, most heartily, that he had not stayed so long, and he hoped Dora would be able to travel to-day. He felt that he was in a strange whirlpool, and he could hardly believe that he, Forster Bethune, had fallen so low. What was he to do? How was he to act? Circumstances seemed to spread themselves round him like a fine net, out of which he could not struggle. The sin had been originally planned by Penelope's uncle, and all the rest had followed, according to the inexorable laws of cause and effect.

As he hurried forward, as if in a dream, and with thick darkness surrounding him, Philip, his friend, was slowly walking with his wife.

"My darling," he said, drawing her arm into his, "my darling, are you at all glad to see me? I have hungered for this moment, but I fought against it because you told me to go." He raised her hand to his lips. It was cold and passive. "Then Forster fell ill, he was very ill, and I had to give up a good deal of time to him. I could not think, I had just to do the next thing that had to be done. There were the men, too, to see after. They will do anything if they believe in you, and it was difficult when Forster was laid by to cheer them up. He has the gift of making everybody obey him willingly and joyfully, but with me it is otherwise; I could only appeal to his influence, but that helped us all. He was so unhappy about us, Penelope; I could not explain, and his noble nature could not understand our relationship to each other. Do you know that it fretted him all through his illness? He blamed himself for having taken me away. He is most good and noble! It was like him to come here to see you, darling."

"He came here to rest. He is going away to-day—or rather he was going, but Dora is not quite well."

"How fortunate I found him still here! But then, Penzie, there was time to think, and I reviewed all our life, and all the

mistakes I had made, but still I felt very hopeful—yes, hopeful. I believed that in time I should win you, my dearest; that all the past would be forgotten, and that out of the ashes of failure something worth far more than mere passion would arise. I have come to live my life by your side, Penzie. When Forster appeared like that to me out there, I was not afraid. I recognised that he was right—he always is—and that I did wrong in leaving you. Now that he is well he will go back, but I shall stay. You are my first duty. For better for worse. Those words in the marriage service have no uncertain meaning."

Philip had spoken in a low voice, but quite calmly, now and then looking furtively at Penelope in order to see the effect his words had upon her. She still went on walking towards the house. To her, all the light of day and happiness of life seemed suddenly to be gone. Philip had come back. He was good, and kind, and grand in his ideas. He seemed now to tower over Forster, and it was almost as if morally they had changed places, but she knew that she loved the one, and that she did not love the other. The chain she wore appeared to her too galling to be borne.

"I have a good deal to tell you, Philip, but now you must be tired. We will leave all explanations till later, when the Bethunes have gone away."

Philip knew by the very tone of her voice that even his absence had not reconciled her to him. Was it quite hopeless? Anyhow, all was clear to him, his duty was to be near her. It was Forster who had first shown him that he was wrong to leave her alone, and he thanked him from the bottom of his heart.

When they entered the dining-room the Duke had already come downstairs.

"Well, Philip, this is a surprise! Why did you not write? You will find several improvements. But there are a few things waiting for your advice—and for your sanction."

"How is the King?" said Philip rather shyly.

"Better, much better, but he has not left off his wandering habits. Where is Bethune? Have you seen him? You must want your breakfast after such a long drive. You must have started very early. Penelope, my dear, you are pale to-day, what is the matter?"

The Duke always spoke in a different tone to his niece than that he used to any one

else, but to-day Penelope could not smile back. Little by little this thought, thus worded, was lodging itself in her brain: "My uncle has ruined my life, he did it—he did it. He meant well, but why did he not know all the misery he would bring about?"

"I am tired, uncle," she said aloud. "Dora is not well. I—I was looking after her."

"Not well! Then certainly they must not go to-day. You must countermand the carriage. Ah! here is Bethune himself. Well, what news?"

Forster entered looking very grave and troubled.

"Dora is not well at all. She won't say anything but that she was frightened. She began walking in her sleep, and then you saved her from further fright, I think, Mrs. Winskill."

"Shall I send for the doctor?" said Penelope, feeling that all her troubles were coming upon her at once. Then, realising that for the present flowers must be strewn over the precipice, she suddenly made an effort to hide all gloomy ideas. "But I am sure Dora will soon be well. It will only make a few days' delay, and I shall have the pleasure of your company a little longer."

She was by nature brave, and she now acted up to her character.

Of course, Forster and Philip plunged into the affairs of the settlement, such as what each man was doing, how they were managing their farms, and what prospects there were of good returns for the money.

"You must go and see Jack when you can tear yourself from the Rothery," said Forster, trying to speak quite naturally, but Penelope noted the effort he was making over himself.

"Oh, you will explain everything better than I can," answered Philip; "besides, I shall not want to travel again for a long time to come."

"And I must return to Africa as soon as possible. How long can we trust them alone, Philip?" and thus the talk continued.

Directly breakfast was over, Penelope rose and left the two together. She felt that she had much to do before she took the great step upon which she was meditating. She would show Philip that it had all been a mistake, and restore him the money he had given so willingly. First she must see her father and make him realise the value of the hidden treasure. His wicked avarice had brought all this misfortune upon the

house of Rothery, and he must now do what he could to make up for the evil he had wrought.

She hurried along the old stone passage haunted by the footsteps of a former Winskill, and then, pushing open a swing door, she entered the old wing, which by the King's special orders had not been repaired. His room was at the end, on the ground floor, of one of the old turrets. Out of his room one ascended some winding stairs leading to the bare, desolate chambers, and here, in this part of the Palace at least, Penelope felt like her old self.

HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINEERING.

INTERESTING books on mountaineering are few and far between, partly because real mountaineering experts are not numerous, and partly because being a mountaineering expert does not necessarily give the climber the gift of being able to tell of what he has done and seen in a readable fashion. But in Mr. Conway's book* we have a volume by an authority, and also one which is eminently interesting and readable.

The points of the book which are most generally interesting are those dealing with the giant mountains and huge glaciers of the Himalayas, and therefore we need not follow him too closely throughout his journey, the story of which he tells from his departure from London on the fifth of February, 1892. The party then consisted of six members, "to wit, Mr. A. D. McCormick, the well-known artist; his friend and mine, Mr. J. H. Roudebush; Mr. O. Eckenstein; Mattias Zurbriggen, the Alpine guide of Macugnaga; Parbir Thapa, a sepoy of the First Battalion of the Fifth Gurkhas; and myself." At Abbotabad the party was reinforced by the Honourable C. G. Bruce, of the same regiment, and four more Gurkhas. These Gurkhas were throughout invaluable to the expedition; looking upon every difficulty as a thing to be overcome, and not shirked, and bearing hardships and dangers without a murmur.

The mountains proper would be first encountered after leaving Gilgit, whither the party set forth from Abbotabad on the twenty-eighth of March, travelling by way of the Vale of Kashmir, partly by Ekkas—the ordinary one-horse, two-wheeled, springless native vehicle—and partly by

* "Climbing and Exploration in Karakoram-Himalayas," by William Martin Conway, M.A., F.S.A., F.R.G.S. T. Fisher Unwin.

canal, while at Srinagar all apparatus of civilised life was left behind, and all else divided into burdens not exceeding fifty pounds.

During the wait here a picnic was organised to the Dal Lake, which is worthy of description :

"Presently the waterway widened, and our men forced the flat-bottomed craft with bolder strokes over the calm lake. Floating fields, moored to the bottom by stakes, replaced the canal banks on either hand. It was delicious to lie and silently watch the hills mirrored in the lake, and the band of fresh green between them, or backwards to look over the line of trees to mountains blue as the sky, crested with snow-fields bright and ethereal as clouds. . . . There were lotus plants floating in the water, and the paddles of the boats we passed twinkled in the sunlight."

This makes a complete and wonderful contrast to the wild scenery which it was Mr. Conway's object to explore and survey.

Before Gilgit was reached the Burzil Pass had to be crossed. This occupied some days on account of the snow, which necessitated the passing of two or three days in the tents, while when in motion it was always difficult to keep the coolies at their work. They seem to have been a most unwilling lot of workers, and to have evinced a preference to sitting down every fifty yards, saying that they would die where they were; it would be quite as easy as on the top!

But the pass was won, and comparing it with Alpine passes, Mr. Conway says :

"The pass in the condition we found it was not like an Alpine pass. It presented no mountaineering difficulties, and no dangers except from storm or loss of way in fog. But it was most fatiguing. Almost every step was upon soft snow, and this grew from bad at the start to worse at the middle, and worst at the end. For the few moments when the sun shone upon us through a clear sky the heat was intolerable."

At Astor they were entertained by the Raja with a game of polo. As the game proceeded with no prospect of ceasing, the Raja was asked how long they went on playing, the answer being :

"As long as your honour pleases."

"Do you have a fixed number of goals for a game?"

"As many as your honour pleases."

"Well, how long do they like to play?"

"It will delight them to play till your honour gives the order for them to stop."

One other anecdote before we reach Gilgit and plunge into glaciers and peaks, which shows that the English rustic in his thickheadedness and general lack of information has his counterpart in the Valley of Kashmir. On approaching Gilgit a native was met and asked :

"Where does the Colonel Sahib live?"

"Don't know."

"The Colonel Sahib—Durand Sahib?"

"Don't know." Being taken by the shoulders: "Salaam!" he said.

"The Colonel Sahib—where does he live? Are you asleep?"

"Salaam!"

"Where are the tents of the sahibs—the English?"

"Salaam!"

"Ass of Gilgit! Where is the fort?"

"I have never seen a fort or sahibs. Salaam! I know nothing."

From Gilgit the object was to explore the Nushik Pass which leads to Nagyr from Baltistan, and here the real mountaineering commences. With incidents so thick it is of course impossible to follow the party step by step, so we can only pick them up from time to time. Their first glacier was the Bagrot glacier, which was found to be an advancing glacier, full of crevasses, and seracs large and small, and so broken up as to appear to be by no means an easy highway to the upper regions. It was the first experience of some of the party of glacier walking. "They amused me by pulling one another, unintentionally, out of the steps, and exchanging mutual recriminations with utmost volubility." The Gurkhas were also taken out to practise step-cutting on the glacier, and to learn the use of the rope and of their climbing irons. They were easy to teach, and delighted their instructor by the free way in which they went along edges of ice and across deep slopes beside deep crevasses. They all worked with such vigour that they smashed two of the ice axes.

Further on, McCormick, Zurbriggen, and Conway loaded up a couple of coolies, shouldered burdens themselves, and started off for a high bivouac, as near as they could come to the head of the southern branch of the Kamar Valley. They made their bivouac at twelve thousand seven hundred feet, and the next day ascended to sixteen thousand two hundred and eighty feet, part of the time pushing their way, waist deep, through the snow. The descent had to be gone about with great care, the rocks being very steep, successive slabs set up on end

and divided from one another by narrow ledges. Although various plans and attempts had been made for crossing the pass to Nagyr, they had not been successful, and it was decided that Conway and Zurbriggen should make one final attempt before returning to Gilgit. They ascended to Windy Camp, which they had occupied before—twelve thousand six hundred and ten feet—and after surveys, Zurbriggen was satisfied that the peak would be ascended if one day of fine weather was granted to free it of the fresh snow, and two more for the climb; but the weather changed, and the snow and storm bade fair to drive them back. An effort, however, they determined to make, and left the camp at five o'clock.

"We crossed the glacier at the foot of the great icefall from the Emerald Pass, and in three-quarters of an hour we were close to the edge of a meadow from which our buttress sprang. Zurbriggen and I had no more than set foot on the grass, when we beheld a huge avalanche-cloud descending over the whole width of the icefall, utterly enveloping both it and a small rock-rib and couloir beside it. Bruce and the Gurkhas were below the rib, and could only see up the couloir. They thought the avalanche was a small one confined to it, and so they turned back and ran towards the foot of the icefall. . . . We had no means of guessing the amount of solid snow and ice that there might be in the heart of the cloud. The rumble increased in loudness, and was soon a thunder that swallowed up our puny shouts, so that Bruce could not hear our warning. Zurbriggen and I cast ourselves upon our faces, and an ordinary strong wind reached us. Our companions were completely enveloped in it. They afterwards described to us how they raced away like wild men, jumping crevasses which they could not have cleared in cold blood. When the snow-dust enveloped them, the wind raised by it cast them headlong on the ice. This, however, was the worst. The snow peppered them all over, and soaked them to the skin; but the solid part of the avalanche was happily arrested in the midst of the icefall, and never came in sight."

After this the climb was resumed, and a height of fifteen thousand six hundred and eighty feet was reached, but snow falling heavily all night, and threatening, by means of avalanches, to cut off all retreat, the ascent was abandoned. Before the descent one of the Gurkhas, Amar Sing, nearly came to grief. Starting down

after an ibex which had come down from higher up, killed by a falling rock, he tried to glissade, but making a mistake, he got into the icy trough of the avalanche, lost his footing, and came rattling down. Turning over on to his face, he clutched wildly at the ice. Fortunately, after descending about two hundred feet, he was tossed, by some bulge in the surface of the ice, into a heap of soft snow. But he continued his descent—in a gentler manner—and helped to find the body of the ibex.

The journey, on the restart from Gilgit, was to lead to Askole by way of Baltit, Nagyr, and the Hispar Pass, by innumerable mountains and glaciers. In the Samaiyar Valley glacier, in their ascent the party found everywhere accumulations of deep new snow, and not a peak approachable, while as the sunlight grew strong the slopes awoke and began to toss off their white mantles. "In particular a peak or rather a culminating portion of a long ridge west of the Samaiyar glacier sent down avalanches of all sizes, one after another; the growling of its batteries became continuous, and remained so for several hours." The camp on this night was at fifteen thousand one hundred and thirty feet.

Between Nagyr and Hobar they were surrounded by mountains, though clouds unfortunately veiled the summits of many of the highest peaks; but there was plenty to be seen. "We looked straight up the Bualtar glacier and could identify the flanks of the crown of Dirran, the two Burchi peaks, and the Emerald Pass. The summit of the Emerald peak was never disclosed. Round to the north-east we had before us, one above another, the many parallel ridges that cut up the country between Gujal and Hispar. Most interesting to us and most conspicuous was the long line of high snow-peaks which bound the Hispar Valley on the north, and under which we must go to reach the Hispar Pass. Behind them were the giants of Gujal; next, in clouded splendour, round to the left, came the wondrous mass of Hunza, and further round the nameless mountains of Budlas which we never beheld unclouded." Of these it was the Hispar Pass which was to be attacked, and which constituted the main difficulty of this route.

While among the precipices of Awkbaasa—which divide the Shallihuru from the Samaiyar Bar glacier—Roudebush had a narrow escape. "After passing the narrow passage, I was about to tread on a broad

mass of ice which bridged a chasm, and over which the caravan went a few minutes before, when I heard what seemed to be a shrill whistle in Roudebush's neighbourhood. I paused, and at that instant the mass of ice I was going to have stepped on cracked up and tumbled into the crevasse it had bridged, making thunder in its descent. I sent Roudebush's coolie and a Gurkha to see what he wanted and to show him the route; they found him half-way down a crevasse into which he had been knocked by a sliding stone. He was caught with a shoulder against one side and a knee against the other, and was thus suspended about twenty feet above a rushing torrent of water, close to a moulin. He could not extricate himself, but they pulled him out by aid of the coolie's long shawl. He lost his hat and stick, but was not hurt. He did not whistle, but shouted. I certainly heard no shout."

On the journey from Mir to Hispar, as the party was approaching the mouth of a deep narrow side nala, they encountered a mud avalanche. A noise like thunder was heard, and a vast black wave was seen advancing down the nala at a rapid pace. When they reached the edge of the nala the main mass of the stuff had gone by, and only a thick stream of mud, which gradually became more liquid, was rushing by; but before they could cross, another huge avalanche came sweeping down.

"It was a horrid sight. The weight of the mud rolled masses of rock down the gully, turning them over and over like so many pebbles, and they dammed back the muddy torrent and kept it moving slowly, but with accumulated volume. Each of the big rocks that formed the vanguard of this avalanche weighed many tons; the largest being about ten foot cubes. The stuff that followed them filled the nala to a width of about forty and a depth of about fifteen feet. The thing moved down at a rate of perhaps seven miles an hour. . . . Three times did the nala yield a frightful offspring of this kind, and each time it found a new exit into the main river below."

Arrived at the Hispar glacier, when Mr. Conway could perceive the whole length and breadth of it, he found it a mighty one—far vaster than any glacier he had ever imagined. The last twenty miles were entirely covered with stones. The surface appeared to be level, and there were no icefalls to be surmounted. "There was nowhere any visible trace of life or man.

It was a glimpse into a world that knows him not. Grand, solemn, unutterably lonely—such, under the soft grey light, the great Hispar glacier revealed itself."

At the foot of the glacier were two well-marked paths—one leading immediately on to and across it, the other being on the way to the alps on the south banks. Conway's party chose the latter.

Further investigation of the glacier soon took place. The second day of the crossing Conway started shortly after five a.m., and spent some hours on it, crossing over nearly to its centre.

"It is a wonderful sight—everywhere swollen into great stone-covered mounds, broken by a black, icy cliff here and there, and dotted with lakes. The thing is on so vast a scale that it takes time to realise its immensity. There are several areas of stony and earthy surface which had evidently remained undisturbed by crevasse convulsions for many years. . . . The whole surface was one mounded grey expanse; more resembling the mid-Atlantic on a grey stormy day than anything else in the world. The stone avalanches that kept pouring down the slopes of the mounds were not unlike the breaking of waves."

At Haigutum, in the crown of the Hispar glacier, the party divided, most to make their way to Askole by way of the Nushik La, while Conway and his division were to try the Hispar Pass. The first night's camp was pitched in a little meadow at the height of fourteen thousand one hundred feet, with a minimum temperature of twenty-eight degrees. The next day they began to enter the domain of snow, which, as they advanced, became thicker and thicker until the crevasses began to be bridged with it. The camp for the second night—Snowfield Camp—was at the height of fifteen thousand two hundred and forty feet, and the third day was spent in the camp, with a superb view spread out, with glaciers and peaks large and small.

"The ridge that runs from the Nushik to the Hispar Pass, rises in a mighty wall direct from the surface of the glacier, and it was this that was ever before our eyes during the day of our halt. It is draped from end to end in shining white. The whole face is swept from end to end by avalanches, and their furrows engrave all its slopes. There are many ice precipices and hanging glaciers. Falls of ice and snow were constantly taking place, and the boom and rattle of avalanches was almost continuous. The average height of the

ridge is considerable, but there are few noticeable peaks rising above the rest. Opposite to us was the finest of these—a hoary giant, the Ridge peak. Further on to the left two or three needles of rock stood on the crest in daring isolation, forerunners of the group of towers with which the Biafo glacier was to make us acquainted."

The next day they approached the pass itself, with great toil, the snow being soft, and the plateau up the gentle slope of which they had to wade appearing endless, and their strength being reduced by the diminished density of the air; but by noon the top was reached, and the slope was bending down before their feet. They had expected to look down such a long valley as they had come up, "but there was no valley in sight. Before us lay a basin or lake of snow. This lake was bounded to north and east by white ridges, and to the south by the splendid row of needle peaks, the highest of which, the Ogre, had looked at us over the pass two days before. From the midst of the snowy lake rose a series of mountain islands white like the snow that bound their bases, and there were endless bays and straits as of white water nestling amongst them. It was the vast blank plain that gave so extraordinary a character to the scene, and the contrast between this and the splintered needles that jutted their ten thousand feet of precipice into the air, and almost touched the flat roof of threatening clouds that spread above them." Mr. Conway says that this was beyond all comparison the finest view of mountains he had ever beheld, "nor do I believe the world can hold a finer," and indeed it is not difficult to believe him. The height of the pass is seventeen thousand six hundred and fifty feet. The downward journey was resumed with anxiety, for the outlet from the great snow basin was not visible from the top, and there were not a few indications that suggested that they might find themselves shut in by a giant icefall, but the misgivings were unnecessary, the outlet was found, and before their eyes sloped away, broad, even, and almost straight, the grand stream of the Biafo glacier, with its wonderful avenue of peaks which rise on both sides of the glacier for some fifteen miles, "one beyond the other, a series of spires, needle-sharp, walled about with precipices on which no snow can rest, and separated from one another by broken couloirs, wherein tottering masses of snow are for awhile caught till they fall

in overwhelming masses on the slopes at their feet. The aiguilles of Chamonix are wonderful, and possess a grace of outline all their own; but these needles outjut them in steepness, outnumber them in multitude, and retrench them in size. The highest of them flings its royal summit more than twenty-three thousand feet into the air, and looks abroad over a field of mountains that finds no superior in the world." Down this glacier the road lay to Askole, which was duly reached. From here the party made a journey to the east, where the country is studded with huge peaks, with the object of making various ascents, returning to Askole, and then continuing the journey southwards.

Of these ascents the most space is given to that of Pioneer Peak. The start was made on the twenty-first of August, and the way lay at first over the seracs to the glacier, which is divided into three sections, and the first thing to be done was to find a way from the central division to the smooth level of the northern; to do this a short series of schruuds had to be passed through, and a steep slope or broken ice wall surmounted. After an unsuccessful attempt—frustrated by a crevasse insufficiently bridged—it was determined to form the camp where they were, and leave the next stage of the advance until the next day. The camp was christened Serac Camp—eighteen thousand two hundred feet. The twenty-second was occupied by Zurbriggen and Bruce in endeavouring to find the way through to the plateau; others of the party were engaged in bringing up stores from a lower camp. On the twenty-third a start was made at six-thirty in magnificent weather, the way lying across hard-frozen snow. After crossing a series of snow bridges before the sun weakened them, the plateau was reached in forty minutes, and camp was formed—Lower Plateau Camp, nineteen thousand feet—and stores carried up from Serac Camp. In the morning the thermometer read twenty-four degrees; hung outside the tent at noon it registered no less than one hundred and three degrees; in the afternoon snow began to fall lightly, and the thermometer dropped to seventy degrees; while the minimum temperature at night was twenty-three degrees. The next day a long snow slope, hard as a board, had to be climbed, to the foot of the arête, but the climbing irons which were used obviated the necessity of cutting steps all the way up. As it was, the mountaineers walked

without a halt from bottom to top in fifty-five minutes, and the tent was set up at Upper Plateau Camp—twenty thousand feet. Zurbriggen and two Gurkhas returned to the lower camp for baggage, taking twenty-seven minutes for the descent and an hour and three-quarters for the re-ascent, "though the snow remained perfectly hard, the difference in time being solely due to enervation caused by the heat of the sun." That night the minimum temperature was sixteen degrees. The next day the preparations for a start took some time, for every movement was a toil. "After lacing a boot, one had to lie down and take breath before one could lace up the other." But at five minutes to six all were ready, and the tents were left with McCormick, who was suffering from toothache and headache, and a start was made upwards. For an hour the party plodded up a long snow slope which led to a ridge, along which a quarter of an hour's walk brought them to the first peak—twenty thousand seven hundred feet. Beyond this first point ensued a difficult rock scramble, with steep slopes or walls of ice descending to the glacier below, and forcing the climbers to keep to the very centre of the ridge; and further on a steep face of mingled rock and ice had to be scrambled up, with the expectation of better things beyond. Unfortunately the ridge leading to the second peak was not of snow, but of hard ice covered with a thin layer of snow, where every step taken had to be cut through the snow into the ice. The time taken to traverse this ridge to the second peak—twenty-one thousand three hundred and fifty feet—was an hour and ten minutes. From here the white ridge lit up straight before them, and the ascent became altogether monotonous, and every step had to be hewn with the axe.

"Our advance was necessarily slow, and the terrible heat which the burning sun poured upon our heads did not add to its rapidity. There was plenty of air upon the actual ridge, and now and again a puff would come down upon and quicken us into a little life; but for the most part we were in the midst of aerial stagnation which made life intolerable. Such conditions dull the observing faculties. I heard the click, click, of Zurbriggen's axe, making the long striding steps, and I mechanically struggled from one to the other. I was dimly conscious of a vast depth down below on the right, filled with tortured glacier and gaping crevasses of monstrous size." But gradually the slope became less steep, and

to avoid a larger mass of cornice than usual they kept away to the right, and presently discovered that this cornice was the actual summit of the third peak on the ridge. "We held the rope tight with all imaginable precaution whilst Zurbriggen climbed to the top. He found a firm place where all could cut out seats for themselves, and thus at two forty-five p.m. we entered upon well-earned repose." A stay was made until four, when they started on their downward way, and in a little more than half an hour had reached the rock of the second peak. The descent was not made without a narrow escape from an accident. The party was in the following order: Harkbir, a Gurkha, was leading; Conway was second; Zurbriggen was last; Bruce and Amar Sing being some way off. Harkbir had no climbing irons, and the steps were half melted off.

"The time came when, as I expected, one gave way, and Harkbir went flying forwards. I was holding the rope tight, and was firm on my claws, and Zurbriggen had the rope tight behind me. The slope was very steep, but we easily held Harkbir. We were not descending straight down the slope, but traversing it diagonally. As soon, therefore, as Harkbir had fallen, he swung round with the rope, like a weight on the end of a pendulum, and came to rest, spread-eagled against the icy face. Now came the advantage of having a cool-headed and disciplined man to deal with. He did not lose his axe or become flustered, but went quietly to work, and after a time cut a hole for one foot, and another for the other; then he got on his legs and returned to the track, and we continued the descent. At the time, the whole incident seemed quite unexciting and ordinary, but I have often shivered since to think of it. The ice slope below us where the slip happened was fully two thousand feet long." The camp was safely reached, and that night, with a minimum temperature to ten degrees, was the last spent at the high altitude. From here a return was made to Askole, where we will leave Mr. Conway and his party, for the greater part of their work was done, and the remainder of their wanderings was over less interesting ground.

To those who take an interest in wild mountain work, or enjoy good descriptions of mountain scenery, Mr. Conway's book will prove an unfailing source of pleasure, for there is hardly a dull page in it, while the illustrations are numerous and effective, being mostly from photographs, and giving

a good idea of the wildness and dignity of the various mountains and glaciers seen in the course of the journey.

THE FIFTEENTH OF JUNE OFF JAN MAYEN.

JAN MAYEN is an island of bare rock situated in the Arctic Ocean, within the Circle, latitude seventy-two, longitude fifteen west. It is well known to sealers, being accounted a favourite landmark for the assembling ground of the old "bladder" or crested seal, which has a fancy for more southern latitudes than its brethren. Other than this, however, it is of no importance, save to the myriads of sea-fowl that darken the sky at the approach of a stranger foot, and find a safe nesting in the clefts and crannies of its lonely sides.

April saw us far north in latitude eighty, among the old "saddlebacks," where we had some fortune; May took us to the whaling grounds in latitude seventy-eight, where we had none; and now June finds us in search of the bladders.

Every one knows that seals in the early spring bring forth their young on a pupping ground selected for that purpose. Millions and millions will thus come together, covering vast fields of ice, so wide that even the powerful long glass from the crow cannot circle them. Each species has its own ground, and there are no outsiders. Unity is the watchword of the seal.

After the pupping is over the seals betake themselves to a new ground for the purpose of basking in the sun and generally enjoying themselves after the wishes of seal nature. And to find this point, which seems vast on land, but is yet a very small speck indeed on the wide Arctic Ocean, is the one hope of the sealer.

Shortly after leaving the whaling grounds we were so fortunate as to cross the line of bladders from the north. Crossing their line means that we noticed now and then ranks of bobbing black-heads ploughing steadily in one direction. And this direction duly noted, we shifted our course, and have now steered four hundred miles to half a point on the compass.

For several days we have not seen so much as a seal's head, but still we hold on our course, blindly as it were. We hope for the best; but we are anxious. More so than we might have been, had not a dense Arctic fog dropped suddenly and caused us to lie by for seventy-five hours.

It is the morning of the fifteenth. Thump! Thump! The stout "Narwhal" quivers from stem to stern, and my head beats a couple of dull notes upon the bulk-head. Again we strike something heavily. There is a hideous noise of grinding and scraping at the bow, which creeps slowly aft and then ceases.

"Some dunderhead on the bridge," say I; yawn, turn over, and try to catch a glimpse of the cabin clock. At this instant one of the watch begins to strike, and strikes seven bells. I must get up.

On deck a harpooner paces the bridge. This, then, is the fool who goes charging into ice. It is like him. He is not a favourite of mine, although he is in the spectioneer's watch.

A light south-wester fills the staysails, and lays us over a little. The sea is rippled like a lake, and dotted with innumerable ice blocks far as the eye can see, and a soft wash, wafted from the largest, indicates the presence of a faint swell. A glorious sun pours from an almost Italian sky. Birds flash around us, like the insect life on a spring day in merry England. And away on the horizon, north, south, east, and west, is one sheet of glittering white, where the ice line meets its own reflection in the far sky.

We are threading our way through a field of open ice.

"Port a little!" sings out the man on the bridge.

"Ay, ay, sir!" and the wheel flies over.

"Steady!"

"Steady it is!"

And so we wind hither and thither, keeping our course as we best can.

"Well, Davidson," say I to the spectioneer who comes forward from the fore-castle to the break of the poop, "have you seen anything?"

"A swimmer or two, that's all, sir," says he in a tremendous sea voice. "But we're in amongst the right stuff now."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"Twelve-foot ice, sir. You won't get bladders on less nor that. I've seen 'em up thirty foot."

"But we got the saddlebacks on thin ice, Davidson."

"Ay, to be sure; but saddles ain't bladders, ye see, sir. They're as diff'rent in their likings as you and me." He takes a look round. "There's the wind a-going to fall off, and it'll be coal up as soon as the captain rises. And a blessing too! We'll

make more speed with the screw at it than we're doing with this 'ere catspaw."

In a few minutes up comes the captain. He takes a look at the course, then he steps up the ladder and on to the bridge.

Eight bells strike, and it is the first mate's watch on deck. The mate comes walking aft.

"Get the ship tidy, Mr. Cameron," says the captain; "the wind's dropping off." Then he steps to the telegraph. The bell rings in the engine-room, and the hand of the dial points to "Full speed ahead."

There is an instant commotion below. The shovels begin to work, and the slamming of iron doors is heard.

The captain turns to the mate.

"Any seals been seen?"

"Yes, sir; Davidson saw four in the morning watch."

"Did he take their course? How were they making?"

"Something like half a point more to the westward, sir."

"Keep that course, Mr. Cameron," says the captain. And—"There's the steward."

He descends for breakfast and we follow him. Coffee, fried ham, bread, butter, and ship's biscuit compose our fare, to which five of us sit down.

"How long will it take you to get steam up, Mr. Brown?" says the captain to the engineer—"Chief," as he is called by the ship's company.

"Twenty minutes, sir," says he promptly, and keeps a forkful of ham under his nose, as he looks across the table expectantly. But the captain is not in a talkative frame, so the chief buries the ham and half the fork with it, and the conversation for the meal closes.

When we reach the deck once more, after our twenty minutes' repast, the wind has already slipped away. The sea lies like a sheet of pearl; a very shadow-glass for the feathered world. Mollies sweep around us, keeping a watchful eye on the cook's pipe. Here and there a great grey, yellow-beaked, yellow-legged burgie circles us with a dissonant croak. And far, far astern sit flocks of lovely snowbirds, showing on the broken water of our wake like a fairy fall of water-lilies.

Aloft, also, circling over the crow's-nest, are a score of sea-swallows. And over the starboard bow two or three boatswain birds are hovering.

The fireman is shovelling again; the furnace doors slam loudly, and an extra mass of smoke pours from the funnel.

Then a tremor runs through the ship, and the screw begins to turn with a long-drawn "whic-whooh" as it scoops up the water.

I step forward to the forepeak, where Mackintosh, a harpooner, is spying the horizon with the fore-castle glasses. The first is ascending the main ratlines to the crow. The ship vibrates soothingly to the action of the engines, and the water plashes merrily at our bow.

Looking ahead, I see the crystal surface of the ocean broken by an animal. A black something rises, and now it is a floe-rat. It swims across us, and as we near, dives; appearing again astern with the suddenness of a sunk bottle.

Many of these pretty little creatures we see sporting about at the ice-edges. And now in front of us are three black-and-white "roches" or little auks. These are quaint little birds with a peculiarly pleasing note. They find a great difficulty in rising from the surface, for their wings are very small and fin-like. Yet I have seen flocks of them, when in full flight from Greenland to their feeding grounds, flying at nothing short of forty miles an hour.

They await our approach with few signs of fear, taking us to be a whale, no doubt; but when not more than twenty yards away they are seized with a sudden fright, try to rise, fail, and finally dive. Can't they dive, too! And what a strangely beautiful effect they have! See them far down, their wings going like fins, and their whole body, in fact the whole circle made by their pinions, of the bluest blue, making the sea seem colourless.

I am still watching them when there is a shout from the mast-head. Every eye looks up. I see the first leaning over the rim of the nest. And now he shouts to the captain:

"Seals on the port bow, sir!"

"Seals!" says each, and there is a sort of choked huzzah from the deck.

"What do you make of them?" sings out the captain. And then: "Starboard a little! Steady as you go!" to the man at the wheel.

"Seems to be a big body of them, sir," cries the mate. "But they're a good bit off."

The captain signs to Mackintosh to take the bridge, and in a few moments he is going aloft up the ratlines.

The first sees him, hastily packs up the long glass, opens the lid of the nest, and tumbles out. He stands at the topgallant crossbar and waits.

A short conversation and they divide ; the first descending with all rapidity, like a cat down a straight tree-trunk.

I await him on the half-deck.

"Yes, sir, we've hit 'em. In two hours we'll be working through the edge of them. And if the captain goes off a bit, for a patch yonder, we'll be drawing blood in the inside of an hour."

I really cannot help giving a slight huzzah, and follow it by a hand over hand up the main-brace.

The first has gone forward, and the men who should be below are now all on deck, dressed in a strange variety of toggery. Some surround the mate, and others are fighting almost heatedly for the possession of the focsle glasses.

The captain, after a long look, now shifts our course, and calls down :

"All hands ready for sealing !"

"Ay, ay, sir !" says the first, and immediately there is bedlam.

Every one hastens below, and the noise rising shortly through the main hatch is like the clatter of an army of young starlings whose respective parents have been taking a half-hour off.

Time slips past, and the fore-part is now crowded with men fully prepared and waiting. The boats, long since cleared of the whale tackle, are now furnished with seal clubs, and provisions and water-cask in case of necessity in the lockers. Most of the men are in white canvas jumpers and wide half-trousers. Their towing-lines and long, curved finching-knives are at their middles. A dangerous-looking crowd they make of sixty men odd.

I am prepared also. My rifle and ammunition are lying on the engine-room top. I have a supply of tobacco, and my pockets are full of biscuits.

We are nearing the first patch of seals, and now little more than fifty yards separates us. There is no order from the crow's-nest to lower away, so the rifles take up a position at the bow.

They are now quite near. How the creatures stare ! I count six of them, and notice one huge old male, or grandfather, as the men call these. Three of them rear up, and—

Bang ! Bang !

We seem to have fired in two parties ; and out of six seals we have only got three. The remainder slip off the ice-edge, raising wreaths of broken water. The grandfather I fired at remains ; but I pride myself unnecessarily, for he has three bullets in him.

"Stop the engines !" bawls the captain. "Lower away a quarter-boat and flinch those seals ! Quick about it, too !"

"Ay, ay, sir !"

The engines cease throbbing, and down drops the port quarter-boat with a splash as the falls are let go. The ice-block is astern, and the boat is now pulling swiftly towards it. In two minutes the seals are flinched and the boat is alongside. The falls are hooked on ; the bell rings in the engine-room ; there is a clank of machinery starting ; the water begins to churn white round the propeller, and we are off.

I look over the taffrail, as the boat is being hauled up by every man that can lay hand on the ropes. A perfect cloud of birds hangs over the ice-block astern ; a wheeling, darting, shrieking throng. Burgies and mollies fight thickly together, croaking and cackling with the excited fury of a French mob. Now and then a great tern swoops downward like a falcon into the midst of them, and engages on all sides. Or a full dozen at a time, when the battle rages indeed with surpassing madness.

But smaller and smaller grow the combatants, and now the noise of contest has passed away.

We are in the thick of the seals. On all sides we notice them as black specks on the gleaming ice-blocks. Some over the starboard chains are quite close to us.

"Stop the engines ! Spectioneer's watch lower away," calls down the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir !" in a chorus.

The orders are obeyed promptly. The starboard boats are slipped, and the men are scrambling over the side like monkeys.

"Come away, sir !" cries Davidson, in his deep, cheery voice.

"Right," say I. And in ten seconds I am in the foresheets.

The falls are unhooked. Davidson gives a push with his oar, and then, altogether, the six larch blades dip in the sea, and at each stroke gather a harvest of pearls out of the ocean's depths.

The other boat is waiting for its harpooner, and the steersman is beginning to swear volubly. Our men give way with a will, and the boat flies on like a torpedo.

"There goes the first's watch," says one of the men, as two boats drop from the davits, and soon after slip from under the shadow of her lines. But no one takes any heed. Two seals are ahead of us. Their heads hang over the edge, and they seem to be asleep.

The spectioneer unships his oar, kneels opposite me, and takes up his rifle.

"Stop rowing, lads." And the oars are motionless.

The boat steadies. Our eye seeks the bead. Two reports sound as one, and the seals shot through the head lie as if they were still sleeping. The oars dip again, and the boat crushes against the ice. No time is lost in the finching. The blubbered skins are quickly aboard, and the men at the oars.

Two great striped grandfathers are the next. Mine is not shot dead, gives a spasmodic jerk, slips over the edge into the sea, and is lost.

Now we have a large patch in view. They seem to be late arrivals, and as such wide awake. There are something like twenty, packed almost like sheep in a pen. Their tails are cocking, and those inland a little are making for the edge. We shall not likely get more than a shot apiece.

As the rowers rest, one alarmed ancient tumbles off with a mighty splash. And then, with wild haste, the whole body pop into the sea, making the immediate circle like a boiling cauldron.

"Well, lads, that's good-bye," says Davidson, laying down his rifle and taking the stroke oar again. "We'll be a long time afore we fill up with them, boys."

The next are somewhat wakeful too; but the crew yell "Lie! lie! lie! lie! lie!" in deafening concord. Sufficient, one would think, to frighten the entire inhabitants of the Arctic Ocean. Not so, however; it has a good effect, seeming to bewilder, or mesmerise the creatures into a state of semi-quietness.

We get four out of six by this means, and are well pleased.

We are now approaching a round dozen of beauties, mostly all grandfathers. They have been some time on the ice. They see us; they stare at us, but they will not so much as lift their heads.

"Now, sir," says Davidson to me, "shoot clean. No wounding; and we've that lot, and a full boat too."

"All right," say I, "mind your eye too."

"I'll do that, sir. And if so be you wounds first I'll have a pound o' bacey from ye."

"Done! And I'll have the bear's teeth in your chest."

"All right, sir. A pound o' cabin bacey, mind," and he chuckles deeply inside himself.

"Stop rowing." The men rest, and the boat glides on.

Davidson fires first. The heads rise at once. But the one shot lies still, so the others take courage from the fact, think it is all right, and sink again.

I take the next one, and the same thing happens, only there are now two lying quiet to ensure courage. The first one, however, that is wounded, we know is the signal for dispersal. So we take time, shooting alternately. And now the last seal is dead.

The finchers scramble on to the ice, and set to work with the quickness of experts. And one by one the heavy skins are thrown into the boat, sinking her lower and lower.

"That's the way to fill a boat," cries the spectioneer, stepping in. "Now, lads, for the ship!"

We have not been away an hour when we run alongside the "Narwhal" with whaler-like deftness. All save one man scramble on board. Only three skins are on deck. The switch tackle is set and ready; the hook is let down into the boat; two skins are attached. "Right!" cries the man. The winch rattles merrily, and up they come, falling flop on the half-deck. They are unhitched, and the process repeated.

In eight minutes we are away again, with the cook and a fireman watching us jealously over the chains.

Thus the hours slip by, and the pile of skins rises steadily on the half-deck. No one has time to feel tired. We have made five journeys and are returning for the sixth time. It is eleven thirty a.m. At eleven forty-five I spring on deck, and for the sixth time the switch tackle empties our freight.

"Are you coming, sir?" cries Davidson, as he prepares to go over the side.

"Wait!" sing I. "I'm out of tobacco."

I plunge hastily down the companion, and seize a lump of the captain's that lies on the table. And now we are off for the seventh time.

But the fifteenth of June is drawing to a close. It is almost midnight. The fiery sun is low down on the rim of the horizon, lipping the sea. Sunset and sunrise commingling are sheeting the heavens in surpassing splendour. The water is ablaze with light. It seems as if the dome above us were the window of a vast volcano. The ice crystals gather in the mysteries of colour, and far off the glittering ice-field clothes itself in the melting glories of dreamland.

The "Narwhal" alone lies dark against

the emerald and crimson northward, every ratline showing with the clearness of a gossamer thread on a summer's morning.

"Ay, sir," says Davidson, "it's amazin' beautiful. It do be."

"Yes," say I, "it is." And that is all.

The boat slips on, and now, slowly, very slowly the great blazing orb rises upward, and the fifteenth of June is ended.

BRITISH SNAKE LORE.

SUPERLATIVE ophiolatry died in Britain with the Druids; a Druid himself being, according to Davies's translation of Taliessin, Appendix 6, "... Druid ... architect ... prophet ... serpent.—Gnadr." Perhaps the single direct survival of the worship is the belief in Cornwall and Wales that snakes meet in companies on Midsummer Eve, join their heads together, and, by hissing, form a kind of bubble round the head of one of them, and so continuing to hiss and blow on the said bubble, cause it to fall off at the tail, when it immediately hardens and resembles a glass ring. This ring, worn as an amulet, is supposed to confer prosperity, success in law matters, safety of person, and other advantages, on a lucky finder. Curiously enough, Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, Bk. 29, Ch. 12, gives a similar account of the origin of, and credulities connected with, this snake ring, or egg—anguinum ovum—amongst the people of the Gallic provinces, instructed by their Druids; adding that it is totally omitted by the Greek authors. He gives an account of one that he actually saw, but this really appears to have been the shell—marine or fossil—of the *echinus marinus* (sea-urchin), for Camden, "*Britannia*," 1695, p. 684, says of the real stones:

"They are small glass annulets, commonly about half as wide as our finger-rings, but much thicker; of a green colour usually, tho' some of them are blue, and others curiously wav'd with blue, red, and white. I have also seen two or three earthen rings of this kind, but glaz'd with blue, and adorn'd with transverse streaks or furrows on the outside."

Davies, "*Mythol. and Rites of the British Druids*," 1809, p. 211, writes of these stones, called Glain Naidr—i.e., adderglass—that they "were artificial, can hardly admit of a doubt, though some have hastily confounded them with certain productions of nature. We find some of them blue, some white, a third sort green, and a fourth

regularly variegated with all these sorts of colours, but still preserving the appearance of glass, whilst others again were composed of earth, and only glazed over." In fact he regards the Ovum Anguinum as the Insigne Druidis, or distinguishing mark of a Druid, quoting Aneurin, the bard, who sang, "Lively was the aspect of him, who, in his prowess, had snatched over the ford that involved ball, which casts its rays to a distance, the splendid product of the adder, shot forth by serpents."

The phrase, "snatched over the ford," again singularly connects the British and Gaulish superstitions, for Pliny remarks that it was necessary for the finder to put running water between the snakes and himself.

Examples of the glain are frequently found in ancient British tumuli; and, doubtless, symbolised the resurrection, for Meilyr, another bard, calls Bardsey "The holy island of the Glain, in which there is a fair representation of a resurrection."

There are offshoots of the original superstition. Richard Carew, in his "*Survey of Cornwall*," writes: "The country people have a persuasion that snakes here breathing upon a hazel wand produce a stone ring of blue colour, in which there appears the yellow figure of a snake, and that beasts bit and envenom'd being given some water to drink, wherein this stone has been infus'd, will perfectly recover of the poison." Mr. Hunt, in his "*Popular Romances of the West of England*," says the country people now declare that it is not safe to venture on the Downs at Land's End without a milpreve—possibly from millepore—which a correspondent of his affirms to be coralline limestone, the sections of the coral passing for entangled young snakes.

Apart from these, however, we have in Britain many strange credulities regarding the snake; strange in that the reptile is here insignificant in size, and comparatively weak in venom; though occasionally, withal, a suggestion of reverence may be observed in connection with it, a little due to vague traditional worship, and somewhat born of physical repugnance. In Sussex, they say these lines are written on the adder's belly:

If I could hear as well as see
No man or beast should pass by me.

A belief in the deafness of the adder is, or was, a vulgar error throughout the country; if, in truth, it was confined to the vulgar, for Randolph, in "*The Muses' Looking-glass*," 1638, act ii., scene 3, has, "How

blest the adders that have no ears!" There are, too, many variants of the following proverbial rhyme still current:

"If I could hear and thou couldst see,
There would none live but you and me,"
As the adder said to the blindworm.

Here are two more errors, for the blindworm, so called, has eyes, and is not venomous. It has another name, slightly more appropriate, slow-worm, but the harmless bob-tailed creature, a link between the lizard and snake, is better called long-cripple in the West Country.

Near Leeds they say that when a snake crosses the path rain is near; and in West Sussex to kill the first snake you see in the year gives you power over your enemies for a twelvemonth, or its skin hung up in the house brings good luck to the tenant. In Shropshire, the dragonfly is the supposed harbinger of the adder, and is consequently called the Ether's Nild or Needle, and the Ether's Mon (man) in various parts of the county. In the Isle of Wight they give the insect the name snakestanger for a like reason. A sickly-looking person with a ravenous appetite is said to have a "nanny-wiper" in his or her stomach, and the only way to lure it forth, say the Sussex people, is to fill a saucer with milk and lie near it with the mouth open, feigning sleep. The nanny-wiper will shortly creep forth to drink the liquor, and may then be killed. In the North Country it is believed that if a native of Ireland draw a ring round a toad or adder, the creature cannot get out, and will die there; but, in the West Country, one should make the sign of the cross within the ring, and repeat the first two verses of the sixty-eighth Psalm. Mr. Hunt states that he once saw a snake not yet dead within a circle, and was told by a gardener that the creature had been so charmed. Gerard, in his "Herball," follows Pliny in the idea that the ash-tree is so obnoxious to the snake that it will sooner pass through a circle of fire than a ring of the leaves of that tree; but Culpepper says, "The contrary to which is the truth, as both my eyes are witness." At Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, at the present time, a snake, however maimed, is invariably hung securely over the bough of the nearest tree, so that it may not escape, for the belief lingers here, as in many parts of the country, that the crawling thing cannot die until sundown.

As a curative agent the snake, dead or alive, is thought highly of. In Suffolk

they hold that goitre may be cured in the following manner. Let a second person hold the common snake by its head and tail, and draw it slowly nine times across the diseased neck; but, after every third time, the creature must be allowed to crawl about awhile. It must afterwards be put alive into a bottle, which should be tightly corked and buried—the swelling will waste with the snake. Some say that the snake should be killed, and its skin worn round the neck. In other parts of Suffolk a Snake's Avel (skin) is worn inside the hat for headache. Mr. Black, in his "Folk Medicine," states that an old man used to sit on the steps of King's College Chapel at Cambridge selling snake sloughs (self-cast skins) for the same complaint. In some places, he goes on to say, it is used for extracting thorns, but its virtue is repellent, not attractive. For instance, a slough bound on the wounded palm of the hand would drive the thorn through to the back.

On the other hand, the old herbalists believed in innumerable preventives and cures. Viper's Bugloss was said to be both. Devil's Bit, Flower de Luce, St. John's Wort, Hedge Mustard, Mithridate Mustard, Tormentil or Septfoil, were all said to expel venom; but the crowning virtue was possessed by the crab-apple, according to a recipe current before the Conquest, preserved in MS. Harl. 585, and translated from the Anglo-Saxon by Cockayne in his "Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft," thus:

This (crab-apple) is the wort which
Wergule hight;
This sent the seal
Over seas ridge
Of other mischief
The malice to mend,
These nine can march on
'Gainst nine ugly poisons,
A worm sneaking came
To slay and to slaughter;
Then took up Woden
Nine wondrous twigs,
He smote then the nadder
Till it flew in nine bits.
There ended it the crab-apple
And its venom, that never it
Should more in house come.

It may be gathered from the context that the "nine ugly poisons" included snake venom and other violent disorders of the blood; the "nine wondrous twigs" being Mugwort, Waybread, Steem (watercress), Attorlothe, Nettle, Maythen, Wergule, Chervil, and Fennel.

In conclusion, these credulities may be mentioned. When a dog or tame beast is bitten by an adder, the wound should be washed with milk from an Irish cow, to make

a cure. A hair plucked from the tail of a living horse and immersed in water produces a water-snake—in Warwickshire they say a leech. The bride or groom whose path to the church the reptile crosses will be unhappy. The notion that snakes suck cows seems to be not entirely devoid of truth; and the old saw:

March win' (wind)

Wakens the ether and blooms the whin,

if not absolute fact, is sufficiently near for a figurative expression.

DR. MEREDITH'S ASSISTANT.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydain*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc., etc.

CHAPTER VII.

"You think I shall be about again come summer, sir? I'm picking up again wonderful now."

"Summer is almost here, Mrs. Wilson. It will be June in a day or two, you see."

"Bless me, sir, why so it is. The weeks do run by! It's only the other day, it seems, that I took that cold; just before you came to Mary Combe, and you've been here——"

"Four weeks exactly, Mrs. Wilson."

It was a lovely afternoon, and the sunlight was lying in great bands of yellow light across the Wilsons' kitchen. The window had a wide sill, full of flowering geraniums in pots, and just under it was a sofa—wide, old-fashioned, and comfortable. On the sofa lay Mrs. Wilson, and in a chair close to her, and facing her, was Dr. Meredith's assistant.

"The young doctor," which was the vague way in which, in preference to the more formal title of "Dr. Godfrey," Mary Combe insisted on distinguishing Dr. Meredith's assistant, had altered a good deal during those four weeks of which she spoke. No obvious alteration was perceptible; indeed, nothing which to the eyes that daily looked upon her in Mary Combe could be called alteration at all. For it was in expression alone that the change lay, and Mary Combe's perceptions took no account of such trifles as expression.

The strong mouth that had been such a feature of Althea Godfrey's face had slightly changed its curves. There was the same strength about them still, but a tiny downward set of the corners had made it obstinate instead of firm, and self-willed instead of

self-confident. The daring and mischievous glance characteristic of the defiance that had shone in her grey eyes had faded, leaving them still defiant enough, it is true, but rather sombre; and that eager impulsiveness of the whole face which had formed the leading half, so to speak, of its expression, was temporarily in abeyance, kept in hand by the other half, the calm, quiet self-possession. The slight figure was perhaps a trifle slighter, and seemed curiously, and yet not aggressively or exaggeratedly, at home in the grey clothes.

Dr. Godfrey smiled at Mrs. Wilson with the words; a smile that was faintly reproduced on the thin face outlined against the red sofa chintz.

Mrs. Wilson had come very near indeed to the shadow which lay before her. Her almost transparent hands, her hollow eyes, and burning cheeks told unmistakeably the truth, even to unprofessional eyes.

She lay quite still on her sofa for a moment after Dr. Godfrey had spoken, and her unnaturally bright eyes seemed to be wandering from the geraniums to the outlook above them. All at once she moved slightly and fixed them on the young doctor's face steadily.

"You do think I'm picking up?"

She half raised herself as she ended, as if by the gesture to get nearer to the face opposite her own, and read it truly.

There was a little pause. Over Althea's face passed a momentary look of uncertainty; and a reluctant, pitying expression came into the grey eyes. The next, the uncertainty was gone, and a steady resolution had taken its place.

"I am afraid not, Mrs. Wilson."

Very firmly the words were spoken, and very gently. Mrs. Wilson let herself fall back quite suddenly on her pillows.

"You don't think I'm better? You don't think I'm stronger?"

The words came in a hoarse and hollow voice.

Dr. Godfrey rose, and drawing her chair much nearer, laid her hand on Mrs. Wilson's thin fingers. They were clasped together and were trembling.

"I am afraid not," repeated the young doctor in the same firm voice, but even more gently than before. "I think it is best to tell you the real truth. I do not think you will be about again in the summer. I do not think you will ever be strong or well again."

Althea's face was full of a very great

tenderness; her steady voice was instinct with pity and sympathy. She watched Mrs. Wilson intently as she spoke the two brief sentences that contained so much, and she saw the quivering face alter as she watched it. But not as she had expected to see it alter. A look of relief came over it, and all the restless excitement was smoothed away by a contrasting stillness.

"Thank you, sir!" The answer came after a long pause. "I daredn't ask you before, but I knew it was so; and I knew you'd tell me true."

Althea did not speak; she only laid her hand again with a reassuring pressure on the fingers that trembled far less now than in their uncertainty.

From outside came all the summer sounds; the cheery life of the village; the clatter of the children just let free from school; the chorus of birds in the elm-trees close by; and the stray note of a distant cuckoo.

"Twenty-three," said Mrs. Wilson, in a low voice; "that's all I am. It's young to die and leave it all. Does my husband know?" she added. "Have you told Tom?"

"Yes," said the young doctor gently, "he knows."

Across Althea Godfrey's mind came the quick remembrance of an evening a week before, when poor Tom Wilson had met her, and stopped her with an anxious entreaty to be told "the truth about the missus." And she had, as tenderly as she might, dealt to him the bitter blow he had dreaded for months.

A long sigh of relief was the only answer.

"Him and me, we've been very happy," she said, in a low voice.

Althea rose and took Mrs. Wilson's thin hand very tenderly in hers. "Good-bye," she said gently. "I think you'll like best to be left alone now."

"Good-bye," was the answer, "and thank you for telling me. Thank you ever so much."

Althea held the thin hand a moment longer, and then she laid it down and went out of the room into the summer sunlight. Her face was rather pale, and all its sterner curves were absorbed and lost for the moment in a great pity. The sombre defiance in her eyes was subdued by their tender, sorrowful gravity.

She turned sharply to her left as she came out, and set off at a quick pace up the hill to her own rooms in the John-sons' house. She was thinking deeply as

she walked, and she could hardly have defined what her thoughts were fixed on; she was half unconsciously living again through the just past sorrowful little scene, and the whole mystery of the sorrow of life was in her mind. The street, the sunlight, the cheery sounds around her as she walked, were all far away and indistinct; for the moment Mrs. Wilson's weak voice was the only sound she heard.

"Thea!"

The voice was close to her; the tone, though low, quick and hard.

Althea Godfrey lifted her eyes sharply. In that one instant they, and with them her whole face, had changed. The defiance in her eyes asserted itself with intense hardness, and the downward set of the corners of her mouth was emphasized to aggressiveness.

"Well?" she said.

Dr. Meredith's expression was not much pleasanter than that of his assistant. A change had come over him also. His physical appearance was much improved. He was not nearly so haggard, nor so thin; and the "driven" sort of look had left his face entirely. It was plain, in fact, that he was no longer overworked. But there was in his expression a sort of half-resigned, half-cynical toleration which was new to it, and seemed to influence every feature. And this, as he faced Althea, intensified until it was quite as aggressive as her own obstinacy.

The cause of the alteration in him was not far to seek. For the past four weeks had been to him the most difficult weeks he had experienced in all his life. In the first place he was now, at the end of them, quite as utterly unable to come to any conclusion regarding the crisis which had been their beginning, as he had been in that beginning itself. That thinking-out of the subject which had been interrupted on the Sunday of Althea's final ultimatum to him, had never yet been carried through to any practical end. Over and over had he begun it again. During long drives into the country, during lonely suppers and sleepless nights, he had approached the whole difficulty afresh, not once nor twice, but countless times.

Each time he began he had resolved that this struggle should be rewarded by some light on the matter. But each time, severally, he had failed to find any; and had, with a great and heavy despondency, relinquished the effort again.

Practically—and perhaps this was a sorer thorn in his side than even his perplexity—he had had to give in. He

had been literally obliged, as Althea had prophesied, to let her assume the position of his assistant. After her own definite public announcement of that position, and the assumption of its duties included in her attention to Mrs. Allen's child and her visit to Orchard Court, there was no choice for him but to acknowledge her as such. And having done so, he could not, naturally, refuse to let her work. So, grudgingly and reluctantly enough, he had had to apportion her her share in his daily work, and to content himself in the leisure thus produced with chafing vainly and helplessly against the compulsion. To Althea herself he had attempted no further remonstrance whatever. Indeed, his intercourse with her during the past four weeks had been as slight as it was possible to make it. If Althea believed that he had meant the words in which he had so angrily broken off their engagement on that Sunday, she had every ground for her belief. His professional orders, expressed in the briefest of words, were the only conversation he bestowed upon her. If he saw her coming he would, if possible, avoid her; if he called at her door he would scarcely ever enter it, and if he passed her in the village during the day, it was with the greeting he would have bestowed on an acquaintance whom he desired to keep at the most careful arms' length.

His whole attitude to her was one of semi-resigned, semi-cynical tolerance of an unavoidable ill; an attitude which naturally enough had left on his face the traces before alluded to.

Perhaps his feelings on the subject were enhanced a little by the fact that his assistant had become during these four weeks very popular in Mary Combe.

It had only needed a very few days to gain for Dr. Godfrey every one's good word. The slight, grey-clad figure had been greeted with appreciative smiles and nods, even on that first Sunday of all, when Dr. Meredith's assistant was met returning from Orchard Court.

The charm inherent in Althea Godfrey's grey eyes and attractive face had been felt at once by men and women alike. Of the two, the women—possibly through that affinity of sex of which they never dreamed—were the more susceptible to it. But the men were loud enough and genuine enough in their praise of "the young chap's straightforward ways," which adjective conveyed the highest form of commendation known in Mary Combe.

Altogether, his assistant's presence in Mary Combe was now a well-established and much-appreciated fact, and there were few days on which unwelcome proofs of this failed to present themselves for Dr. Meredith's notice.

A small schoolchild danced up to Althea now as they stood there, and the smiling recognition with which it was dismissed lent an extra touch of acerbity to Dr. Meredith's tone as he said shortly:

"Where have you come from?"

"Mrs. Wilson," was the short reply. "What do you want?"

His assistant spoke to Dr. Meredith in a voice that certainly did not err on the side of cordiality. It would have been difficult to realise that this was the same individual who had stood by Mrs. Wilson but ten minutes before.

"I've been to your rooms," he answered with apparently irrelevant terseness. "Can you go to Stoke Vere this afternoon? I'm sent for to Fern Morton."

"Stoke Vere?" repeated his assistant, carelessly enough. "Yes, I suppose I can. What is it?"

As she spoke Althea Godfrey was playing with a little stick she carried; balancing it, with a sort of ostentatious indifference, first on the palm of one hand and then on the other.

"What is it?" she repeated, somewhat sharply, as Dr. Meredith did not at once reply.

"Miss Swinton," he said; "Rose Swinton."

Althea Godfrey was in the act of transferring the stick from one hand to the other. She paused, sharply and suddenly; the stick dropped from her hands and fell with a little clatter into the dusty road. She raised the grey eyes which had till now been fixed on the knots in the stick to Dr. Meredith's face. She scanned it with a quick, startled scrutiny—a scrutiny that she had never bestowed on it since her arrival in Mary Combe.

He was perfectly unconscious of the look, for he was staring over her shoulder, with an abstracted look in his eyes.

"Can you go at once?" he added, in a tone the sharpness of which had a slight ring of anxiety.

Althea Godfrey moved her eyes from his face as suddenly as she had raised them. Then she stooped and very deliberately picked up her stick; not raising her head again when she had done so, but keeping her eyes steadily fixed on the ground.

"Who is Miss Rose Swinton?" she said. She spoke slowly, and there was a tone in her voice which was strange to it. "I thought your only patient at Stoke Vere was an old clergyman!"

Dr. Meredith made an inarticulate sound of impatience.

"Old clergymen have been known to possess families," he said sarcastically. "This is his daughter, his only daughter. Now, can you go at once?" he added sharply. "Because if not, say so! I'll go myself. I fully intended to go myself until a quarter of an hour ago, when this Fern Morton message came. Plague it!"

The words were spoken in a tone of keen vexation and irritation.

Althea's hands clenched suddenly round her stick. There was unusual feeling of some sort in the gesture, and also in her voice as she said even more slowly than she had spoken before:

"Yes, I'll go at once. What is wrong?"

"I don't know, that's the worst of it. The note was absurdly indefinite. However, you'll see."

Althea made a movement of assent without lifting her face, which was still fixed on the road.

"I'll send William with the cart to Johnsons' for you at once, then," he added, and turned sharply away to carry out his words.

Althea meanwhile walked up the hill very rapidly, her face still bent on the ground.

Arrived at her own rooms she electrified Mrs. Johnson by refusing, with a brusqueness of manner the good woman had never before heard from her lodger, the afternoon tea which was standing waiting for her. On the daily preparation of this refreshment Althea had at her arrival insisted with some energy. The arrangement was difficult for Mrs. Johnson to grasp at first, and furthermore she had, as she said to Mrs. Green, "never known no gentleman so particular to his tea" as the young doctor. This fact made it the more difficult for her to grasp the circumstances now, and she decided slowly, as from the shop she watched Dr. Godfrey spring quickly into the dog-cart, that something of grave moment indeed must have occurred.

The dog-cart was driven by William, Dr. Meredith's loquacious and invaluable man. This loquacity was apt to reach its flood when he drove "the young doctor." He had a certain awe of his master which somewhat stunted his flow of words. But

Dr. Godfrey was usually ready enough to listen to the monologue which constituted William's conversation, and the word or two which were all his listener was ever able to insert were construed by him into a gratifying encouragement.

This afternoon, sure of a sympathetic audience, he launched, in the first quarter of a mile, into one of his longest recitals. It lasted for some twenty minutes or so, and then a shock awaited William. He discovered that his usually ready listener had not been listening at all, as was proved by the wondering face turned to him when he ended with a question. Dr. Godfrey apologised abstractedly for this, and William relapsed into a silent and injured surprise, which lasted until they turned into the garden of Stoke Vere Rectory. It was still brighter and more flowery now on this May afternoon than it had been when Dr. Meredith had ridden over to see Mr. Swinton four weeks before.

The neat, middle-aged servant who opened the door in answer to Dr. Godfrey's ring, hesitated a moment at the sight of a strange face.

"I am Dr. Meredith's assistant," Dr. Godfrey said briefly. With a glance at the cart and William the maid's hesitation vanished.

"This way, please, sir," she said, and Dr. Godfrey followed her half-way down the long passage through which Rose Swinton herself had preceded Dr. Meredith on that evening four weeks before, and then up a short flight of stairs to a landing with two doors. The nearer of these the maid opened, and with the announcement: "The doctor, if you please, Miss Rose," stood back to let the young doctor go in.

Althea Godfrey entered a small, cheerful-looking room, with a modern imitation of an oak wainscot running round it for a dado. It was furnished conventionally enough, and chairs and tables alike were covered with the miscellaneous odds and ends of a girl's pursuits—racquets, music, work-things, seemed to spread themselves everywhere in untidy confusion. There was a large fire in the grate, warm May afternoon as it was, and in a basket-chair, drawn as close to the fire as possible, was Rose Swinton, with a shawl over her shoulders.

She was wearing a cotton dress which, though tumbled, was quite as smartly made as the blue serge in which she had received Dr. Meredith, and her pretty brown hair showed signs of having been very recently

twisted afresh into its elaborate coils and curls. Her face was flushed with a very bright colour, and her blue eyes shone with a feverish light.

With the very first movement of the door she had hastily raised herself from a crouching position, and turned her face towards it. Her eyes were therefore full on Dr. Godfrey at her entrance.

A flush of amazed incomprehension shot into them; Althea saw that. And she saw something more; something more was very visible in Rose Swinton's eyes, and that something was keen disappointment.

"I don't understand," she said hesitatingly and almost curtly. "Is Dr. Meredith away?"

"I am Dr. Meredith's assistant, and I have come in his place."

Althea Godfrey spoke with a chilling precision which seemed to create then and there an atmosphere of antagonism between herself and the girl before her. But Rose Swinton seemed not to be aware of it. She stared steadily at Dr. Meredith's assistant, which occupation absorbed her for several seconds.

"Won't you sit down?" she said suddenly. "Take that chair."

"That chair" was a chair opposite to Rose Swinton, on the other side of the hearthrug. Althea obeyed mechanically, and a moment later the doctor and patient were face to face.

Althea Godfrey told herself that it was her professional duty to check off, one by one, the details of Rose Swinton's appearance.

Rose Swinton, meanwhile, seemed to find her curiosity heightened by proximity, and calmly concluded her survey of the young doctor.

Complete as the process was in each case, it was, however, only momentary. Scarcely three seconds had really elapsed before Rose Swinton spoke.

"Is Dr. Meredith so very busy, then?" she said.

She had not known that the disappointment had been visible in her eyes. Still less did she know that her voice was instinct with it, in too strong a measure to let it be mistaken for a moment by the other for the petulance of ill-health.

Althea's professional inspection had left traces on her face. Her expression had become very set, and that antagonism seemed to pervade every feature. Her voice was even more chillingly measured than before as she said with apparently unnecessary emphasis:

"Very busy? Oh, no, not specially so."
"Oh!"

The interjection contained a variety of emotions, in which, perhaps, a decidedly mortified vanity was the strongest. Althea scrutinised her patient calmly and mercilessly with a covert gleam in her eyes, while Rose Swinton dragged her thick shawl more closely round her with an irritated gesture.

The movement, slight as it was, served to awake in Althea her professional instincts.

"Miss Swinton," she said coldly and firmly, "I think we had better come to the point. May I ask you to tell me what is wrong with you?"

The curt professional tone was not without effect on Rose Swinton. She pulled herself languidly up in her chair, and looked at the young doctor with a half-concealed deference.

"I'm sure I can't think," she began in an aggrieved tone. "It was father who wrote to Dr. Meredith. He's out now," added Mr. Swinton's daughter parenthetically. "I've caught a cold, I think."

"Can you account for it in any way?"

"No. Unless it was Thursday afternoon."

"You were out in the rain?"

"I had some people to tennis; it pelted—you know how it pelted on Thursday; and Bob Wallis—do you know the Wallises? They are at Ringways—Bob Wallis is rather a good sort."

"No."

The monosyllable was very curt and clear.

"Well, he proposed that we should play just the same, for a lark, you know; and it really was a most awful lark. We were drenched."

"Ah!" Althea's eyebrows were raised sharply as she spoke, and her grey eyes beneath them were full of sarcasm. "I only hope, Miss Swinton, that the enjoyment you derived at the time may prove a compensation to you, for I do not think you will find the result give you much pleasure."

Althea's curt tone grew even more curt as she put to her patient a few searching technical questions.

"Can't you do anything?" said the girl fretfully, when the questions were ended. "It's simply hateful to feel so seedy. I'm never seedy. And I must be all right to-morrow; I'm going over to the Wallis's to lunch for a return match, and father wants me to take the choir practice in the evening, too."

"You will not think of going out until

"I give you leave. I will send you something directly I get back. And Dr. Meredith or I will see you to-morrow."

Althea made a movement as if she meant to rise from her chair; but Rose Swinton, who had been looking sullenly into the fire during the curtly-expressed commands, turned her head sharply at the mention of Dr. Meredith's name, and Althea, scarcely knowing exactly why she did so, established herself again in it.

"You said Dr. Meredith was not very busy just now?"

"I did."

The answer was not an encouragement to pursue the subject, but Rose Swinton apparently ignored that circumstance.

"He has you to help him," she remarked. "How long have you been here, Dr.—— I did not catch your name?" she added indifferently.

"My name is Godfrey."

Althea had grown accustomed in the past four weeks to this half statement, and had made it quite calmly innumerable times. But at this moment she spoke the short syllables with an intense aggressiveness.

"I have been in Mary Combe four weeks," she added.

"Have you?" Rose Swinton's tone was dry. She could not have explained the burning desire she suddenly felt to be disagreeable to Dr. Meredith's assistant. She "hated him" she said to herself. "A perfectly hateful young man" was the designation she had given Althea in her own mind.

"I wonder I have not heard Dr. Meredith speak of you," she continued.

"Have you seen Dr. Meredith since my arrival, then?"

The question was very blandly asked; and the snappish tone of Rose Swinton's "No, I have not," was oddly incongruous.

There was a moment's pause, and the two pair of eyes each stared into the glowing fire.

They formed, indeed, a curious contrast, as did the faces to which they belonged.

In Althea Godfrey's, every feature was set and fixed. In Rose Swinton's waves of angry, uncontrolled irritation swept visibly over the mobile, girlish face.

"You are a friend of Dr. Meredith's, I suppose?"

"Have you any one to look after you?"

The two questions broke the pause simultaneously. A significant testimony as to which was the stronger of the two individualities was given by the fact that Rose Swinton, after a moment's hesitation, did not repeat her decidedly inquisitive question, but answered the other with a certain sullen meekness.

"To take care of me!" she said. "Yes, of course, Emily looks after me. She showed you in. She has been here since I was a child. Didn't you know that I am alone here with father?" she added, in an aggrieved tone which arose from the reflection that she had certainly not been much discussed with the young doctor. "But I don't want taking care of!" she said angrily. "I tell you I shall be all right to-morrow!"

"That remains to be seen," said Althea composedly, rising meanwhile decidedly from her chair. "Good afternoon," she continued, with cold suavity.

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